

# ED286701 1986-03-00 Establishing an Outdoor Education Organization. ERIC Digest.

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## Establishing an Outdoor Education Organization. ERIC Digest.

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TEXT: "Outdoor educators" from all disciplines will benefit greatly by being part of an outdoor education organization at a local, regional, or state level. Such an organization enables individuals and groups with a common interest in outdoor education to share new information and techniques and to learn new skills. Individuals with more experience teaching outdoor programs are continually "renewed" as they share attitudes and information with less experienced educators. An outdoor education organization can provide hands-on activities through workshops and can share valuable information on available human resources and resource materials through its newsletter. Because outdoor education is multidisciplinary, there is definitely a need to

have an organization that brings individuals and groups together in order to appreciate, understand, and promote the wise use of the total environment by all people.

Perhaps when more states have outdoor education organizations a national network can be established. Meanwhile, the challenge is to organize wherever there is interest and need--whether at the local, regional, or state level. The rationale need not be the same for all states. Educators in a single city may organize in some instances, even if there is no statewide organization. In other circumstances, regional or local groups may consolidate as a spinoff of a strong state organization. This digest suggests steps to take to organize at any level.

### WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP?

After an individual or group has determined the need for an organization and an area to be served, the first step requires initiating a meeting. Persons interested in outdoor education should be identified from a variety of areas such as public and private schools, colleges and universities, camps, and agencies, as well as from allied professional organizations.

Letters should be mailed to no more than 20 key persons, stating the purpose, location, and time and date of the meeting. A convenient return form should be enclosed so that a response can easily be made regarding one's interest in such an organization and availability to attend the organizational meeting. A follow-up letter should be sent verifying the meeting place, date, and time, and providing a detailed agenda. It should be made clear that the meeting is a "work" session rather than just a "talk" session. Participants should be asked to bring ideas and information such as brochures of other organizations, newsletters, membership cards, constitutions and bylaws.

### WHAT ARE SUBSEQUENT STEPS?

In order to establish an outdoor education organization, specific steps must be followed which represent an ongoing process from the very first meeting to a point when the organization achieves stability.

**IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE** of the organization. Purposes may be similar to those adopted by the New York Outdoor Education Association which state that the association is dedicated to: --Promoting outdoor education in New York State. --Encouraging quality education through outdoor experiences as a process for fulfilling educational goals. --Fostering the development of attitudes, values, and behavior that show an understanding of man's interdependence with the natural world.

**DETERMINE THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED** by the organization. The Texas Outdoor Education Association lists such services as: --Workshops to provide educators of all disciplines with first-hand teaching/learning experiences, using the outdoors as a classroom. --Newsletters designed to inform members of activities, programs, and

events related to outdoor education. --Resource services for guidance to individuals, educational institutions, organizations, and agencies interested in using the outdoors as a learning laboratory. --Certification programs for individuals who wish to become instructors in selected teaching areas.

COMPILE A LIST OF IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM GOALS for the organization and prioritize it. Immediate activities may include printing and designing membership brochures, cards and stationery; creating a logo; hosting a conference each year; selling T-shirts; or publishing a newsletter. Long-term goals may include publishing a journal, hiring a full-time executive director, printing a membership directory, or publishing curriculum materials. Such a list involves in-depth brainstorming in order to differentiate between (1) tasks that should be accomplished for the immediate growth of the organization and those that should be attempted only after the membership increases, or when funding is obtained from support organizations; and (2) administrative tasks (e.g. cards, logos, etc.) and plans that meet the purpose of the organization (e.g., identifying outdoor educators, sponsoring workshops, etc.)

SELECT OFFICERS FOR THE FIRST YEAR of operation and meet at regular intervals to complete the preliminary concerns of the organization. This relatively small group of dedicated individuals serving as officers and committee members may be thought of as a steering committee for the first year of operation.

Determining officers who need to be elected to run the business of the organization is essential. For a state organization, the following titular criteria should be considered: President, President-Elect, Past President, Vice-President for Finance, Vice-President for Membership, Vice-President for Public Relations, and Recording Secretary. Several Members-at-Large may be designated. Fewer officers may be needed for a local or regional organization.

Specific duties of each officer should be considered carefully and need to be clarified in the constitution. In general, the President is the chief executive officer, the President-Elect coordinates all workshops and conferences, and the Past President serves as the chairperson of the Nominating Committee.

The Vice-President for Finance handles accounts; the Vice-President for Membership conducts membership drives and maintains updated lists of members; and the Vice-President for Public Relations publicizes the organization and edits the newsletter. The Recording Secretary keeps accurate minutes of all meetings and maintains a file of all correspondence.

Consideration should be given to the availability of dedicated individuals to serve as officers. The ultimate success of an organization is often dependent on the involvement of many individuals, not just a select few. Having a very small executive board may not provide the continuity necessary for growth.

IDENTIFY COMMITTEES ESSENTIAL for efficient operation. This need should be assessed at the first organizational meeting. Committees should be named; tasks identified with suggested time guidelines for completion; members appointed; and so forth. Significant committees during the early years of the organization include the following: --Membership Committee--to identify potential members; to design, print, and distribute a membership brochure; to maintain a file of members, etc. --Constitution and Bylaws Committee--to write the constitution and bylaws according to appropriate form; to assist in having them approved by the membership; to distribute copies to those concerned; to evaluate each periodically and propose changes, etc. --Financial Committee--to propose policies for transacting business; to design financial forms for reporting to the membership; to determine potential income sources; to seek funding; to secure nonprofit, tax-exempt status, etc. --Newsletter Committee--to determine the format, special columns, number of issues, publication dates, method of distribution, means of funding, etc. --Workshop Committee--to propose guidelines for workshops and conferences; and determine the number held each year, the sites, registration fees, coordinators, workshop presenters, program formats and themes, etc. --Resource Services Committee--to consider various types of resources that can be made available to the membership; to identify curriculum and audio-visual materials appropriate to the needs of the membership. --Goals Committee--to formulate the immediate and long-term goals of the organization; to evaluate periodically; to help implement ways of achieving goals. --Nominating Committee--to identify the most qualified persons to run for office; to gather data on the candidates; and to conduct the election. Obviously a strong local or regional outdoor education organization would not require all of the committees listed above. Committees should be appointed only if their concerns address immediate and long-range goals of the group.

WRITE THE CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS for the organization. This is necessary in order for the organization to apply for nonprofit status. But regulations should be kept as simple as possible. Failure to write a specific constitution and bylaws can cause problems later, and soliciting experienced advice is highly recommended. The constitution and bylaws should include the names, purpose, logo, membership, dues, meeting schedules, makeup of the executive board, officers, committees, and their lengths of terms and responsibilities.

#### WHAT AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS CAN ASSIST?

Contact should be made with the many allied professional organizations that share common purposes with the outdoor education organization. Addresses may be obtained from local libraries or other sources. Such allied organizations may include:

American Camping Association Association for Experiential Education Conservation Education Association Council on Outdoor Education of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) Missouri Coalition for Education in the Outdoors National Association for Environmental Education National

Association for Recreation and Parks National Science Teachers Association New York State Outdoor Education Association Texas Outdoor Education Association

Government agencies whose goals are compatible should also be contacted. Several of these agencies are designated differently in different states:

Department of Conservation Department of Natural Resources State Department of Education State Parks and Wildlife Department National Park Service United States Forest Service

The CONSERVATION DIRECTORY of the National Wildlife Federation (1412 Sixteenth Street, NW; Washington, DC 20036) lists government agencies and citizens' groups for each state. This information will be very helpful to those establishing outdoor education organizations.

Outdoor educators might also consider nature centers and museums and the support and interest of specialty clubs such as:

Bass Fishing Clubs Ducks Unlimited Safari Club International Sportsmens' Clubs

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